DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 391 146 CS 012 332

AUTHOR Gaffney, Janet S.; Paynter, Susan Y.
TITLE The Role of Early Literacy Interventions in the Transformation of Educational Systems. Technical Report No. 617.
INSTITUTION Center for the Study of Reading, Urbana, IL.
PUB DATE Nov 95
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Early Intervention; *Educational Change; Literacy; Primary Education; Program Development; Program Implementation
IDENTIFIERS Reading Management; *Reading Recovery Projects

ABSTRACT

A literacy intervention is designed to produce accelerated change, moving student achievement rapidly and providing for sustained performance over time. Adopting a complex intervention is a problem-solving process that requires understanding of the conceptual congruity of all aspects of the theory, intervention, and training underlying the intervention. Some of the elements within Reading Recovery address the complexity of implementation and the accompanying structures that support meaningful change. Structures include those that foster sustained teaching success, leadership structures for addressing complexity, and structures for leading consensus-building communication. The presence of a strong network of support for the broader concepts of an intervention helps to build assurances of quality during initial adoption that can then be maintained in subsequent implementations. One aspect of the Reading Recovery network that lends stability to the project as it expands is the constructive nature of the on-going professional development that promotes continual discourse regarding quality and consistency among a large number of continually expanding project sites. As a provider, Reading Recovery has structured central data and information centers to support expansion efforts. The role of interventions, embedded in host systems, that provide substantial change for the most needy individuals in the system is an essential role for the transformation of American education. (Contains 15 references.) (Author/RS)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 391 146

Technical Report No. 617

# THE ROLE OF EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTIONS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Janet S. Gaffney
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Susan Y. Paynter
Jackson, Mississippi

November 1995

# Center for the Study of Reading

## TECHNICAL REPORTS

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

T. Fisher

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

College of Education
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN
174 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820

CS012332

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

# CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

Technical Report No. 617

## THE ROLE OF EARLY LITERACY INTERVENTIONS IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

Janet S. Gaffney
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Susan Y. Paynter
Jackson, Mississippi

November 1995

College of Education
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
174 Children's Research Center
51 Gerty Drive
Champaign, Illinois 61820

## Abstract

A literacy intervention is designed to produce accelerated change, moving student achievement rapidly and providing for sustained performance over time. Adopting a complex intervention is a problem-solving process that requires understanding of the conceptual congruity of all aspects of the theory, intervention, and training underlying the intervention. This article explores some of the elements within Reading Recovery that address the complexity of implementation and the accompanying structures that support meaningful change. Structures examined include those that foster sustained teaching success, leadership structures for addressing complexity, and structures for leading consensus-building communication. Issues of dissemination and expansion are then explored.

# The Role of Early Literacy Interventions in the Transformation of Educational Systems

Literacy interventions, especially those that are successful in bringing students to high levels of literacy, cannot be considered isolated phenomena in schools. The promise of an intervention is that it seeks to impact existing conditions in such a dramatic way as to change the subsequent course of events. Whereas conventional instruction is designed to provide continuous service with no goal for accelerated achievement, a literacy intervention is designed to produce accelerated change, moving student achievement rapidly and providing for sustained performance over time by the participants. Interventions are change agents within educational systems extending the principles of change into the existing host structures. Implementing an intervention is a worthwhile but complicated undertaking, and the complexity of the endeavor reflects the magnitude of change required of the individuals responsible for implementation.

It is an important paradox that change must be conceived at the level of a system, but change can only be achieved at the level of the individual's performance. "In saying that change occurs at the individual level, it should be recognized that organizational changes are often necessary to provide supportive or stimulating conditions to foster change in practice" (Fullan, 1991, p. 46). A planned approach to the network of structures that promote or constrain the change process is needed within each system (Clay, 1993b; Dalin, 1978; Fullan & Miles, 1992). Thus, adopting a complex intervention is a problem-solving process that requires understanding of the conceptual congruity of all aspects of the theory, intervention, and training underlying the innovation.

For an innovation to be incorporated effectively into a system, the parts of the innovation must be externally congruent and cohesive with the host system (Clay, 1993b). The type of complex change that actually acts as a catalyst for accelerated progress of students and changes their sustained performance requires more effort than simple or superficial change and must be accompanied by ways of addressing this complexity. In this article, we explore some of the elements within Reading Recovery that address the complexity of implementation and the accompanying structures that support meaningful change.

## Change within Systems

### Structures that Foster Sustained Teaching Success

Perhaps the changes in a teacher's knowledge, skills, and behaviors that must be sustained over time best exemplify the complexity of transforming a system; it is at this individual teacher level that change does or does not occur. One prominent literacy intervention, Reading Recovery, is based on a theory of reading acquisition that acknowledges the complexity of *learning* how to read and write continuous text (Clay, 1990) and on a comparable professional development model that acknowledges the complexity of *teaching* children how to read and write, especially children who are experiencing the greatest difficulty getting underway. Just as reading is a problem-solving activity, so is teaching reading a problem-solving activity. One way that Reading Recovery meets the demands of complex change for teachers and learners is through a three-tiered staffing scheme in which Trainers of Teacher Leaders (university level) prepare Teacher Leaders (district-wide leaders) who, in turn, conduct extended professional development for teachers (school-based instructors).

The delivery of an intervention demands that teachers be trained to teach in such a way that the lowest-achieving children may produce accelerated rates of progress. This is a new and very complex skill for teachers; even highly capable teachers have to learn how to deliver effective literacy intervention instruction. The magnitude of a teacher's personal effort, reflection, and action that are associated with constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing one's knowledge and beliefs about how children learn,

and specifically about how children learn to read and to write, cannot be minimized. While many educational efforts are evaluated on the basis of either teaching performance or student performance, the success of the Reading Recovery intervention is measured by rigorously evaluating both teaching and learning--not just one or the other. The year-long, professional-development model of Reading Recovery reflects the challenge of preparing high-craft teachers who are able to achieve this goal. In Reading Recovery, teachers improve their teaching as well as children's learning (Clay, 1991, p. 69). The process of changing one's teaching behaviors can be overwhelming. Even very good teachers may be overcome by the expectation that they need to do *more* than they are already doing. This expectation comes from the basic assumption that more time, more activities, more evaluation, more...is better. Reading Recovery and teaching for acceleration is not about teaching harder, doing more; it is about teaching differently. The origins of successful progress lie in the teacher-student interactions. When teachers observe changes in the reading and writing behaviors of children that they are certain have been fostered by changes in their teaching, they assume personal and individual responsibility for the results with these children. The teacher perceives a direct relationship between his or her decisions and the performance of the student and becomes the owner of the job of teaching. The teacher's response is not "this is a good program" but "I can teach anyone to read." This deep ownership of a reform comes through learning; not before (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 749).

## Leadership Structures for Addressing Complexity

"Change initiatives do not run themselves" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 751). By stating the obvious, Fullan and Miles point out the need to manage the adoption and institutionalization of interventions promoting substantive change. They describe school improvement as a problem-rich process, and argue that effective facilitators "embrace problems rather than avoid them" (p. 750). The complexity of Reading Recovery and the challenge of implementation in the context of each new school creates openings for communication with a wide array of educators who enter the process with diverse interpretations. Teacher Leaders are deliberately tutored in leadership roles during their initial training and are encouraged to accept differing views about the program as opportunities for education (Clay, 1991). The simultaneous roles of the Teacher Leader as teacher of children, teacher of teachers, and program implementor enable the leader to communicate with various audiences about the rationales underlying the program. The Teacher Leader learns to be receptive to the issues and concerns raised by colleagues, interprets them in light of the rationales, and participates in joint problem solving. In responding to these various constituencies, the Teacher Leader gradually builds a network of informed colleagues with shared understanding to assist in the continuing effort to promote accelerated change. The Teacher Leader is described by Clay as fulfilling the role of Goodlad's (1977) "redirecting system" that preserves the integrity of the innovation from alterations that lead to conformity with previous and ineffective conventional practices. Fullan (1990) describes the tendency of an existing host system to make an innovation look more familiar and conventional as a way of simplifying the concept or downsizing the scale due to the initial challenges of implementation. Smoothing the rough edges may actually sandpaper the project to death. Simple projects have smaller problems and although startup problems may be eliminated by reduction and oversimplification, the effects of the project are often modest and result in a trivial enterprise (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Supported by these researchers is the truth of the ancient Talmud "For a great goal every hardship is trivial, for a trivial goal every hardship is great."

## Structures for Leading Consensus-Building Communication

Within each system, teachers and administrators construct a set of shared assumptions about their work. These "normative agreements are at the heart of the school enterprise" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 30). Change is the result of the transformation of these normative agreements that emanate from the communication among school personnel. Clear statements about significant goals remain imperative for engaging others in the change process, but Fullan (1991) cautions that clarity at the outset helps, but

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

does not eliminate problems. "Each and every individual who is necessary for effective implementation will experience some concerns about the meaning of new practices, goals, beliefs, and means of implementation" (p. 45). The role of the Reading Recovery community (teacher, Teacher Leader and Site Coordinator) is to promote communication about what is important and what is possible in terms of student achievement among other educators and community leaders. The skill required to lead such consensus-shifting dialogue is the result of the substantial training, extended modeling, and personal transformation experienced by Reading Recovery personnel.

The challenge to most school personnel is to choose not to participate in a "conspiracy of tolerance" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 175) in which educators tacitly agree that there will always be a group of children for whom reading and writing at average levels is unattainable. A shift from this "normative agreement" comes only after the experience of seeing "unexpected" children excel frequently enough to question the conventional consensus model. The layers of experience and communication that lead to such a shift are all steps toward a new consensus.

The results of Rosenholtz's (1989) study of teachers' workplace indicated that in schools with a high consensus regarding shared goals, teacher talk is predominately about the substance of teaching and student learning, whereas in schools with moderate or low consensus about instructional goals, teachers' talk revolves around student conduct. The function of an informed literacy team within the system is to engage in conversations that help to build a new consensus regarding the universal nature of literacy and the possibility of intervention methods to effectively support and sustain achievement. The new consensus is a shift from a conspiracy of tolerance to a promise of success. Consensus and shared meaning are developed and reshaped through waves of communication. One Teacher Leader has described this process as requiring many opportunities for dialogue over time to promote the focus of resources and commitment from administrators, teachers, parents, school board members, and community leaders toward the changing agenda of early literacy success for all children.

## Dissemination and Expansion

### The Necessity of Networks for Intervention Models

One significant and essential element of systemic change resulting from intervention is the reality of strong networks beyond any single site. An educational intervention, by definition, serves a specific population that is embedded within the general enterprise of schools and is compatible with this enterprise, but not central to it (Clay, 1993b). Interventions can provide the system with a potency for change that must be protected even as the intervention begins to affect the rest of the system. The presence of a strong network of support for the broader concepts of an intervention (the power of intervention to change achievement and literacy for all children, for example) help to build assurances of quality during initial adoption that can then be maintained in subsequent implementations. Without the network of support, quality can wane under the greater weight of conventional practice.

Another essential element for quality is the expectation that the intervention will be structured to work over time. Short-term expectations can impede the change structures of an intervention. "Local educators experience most school reforms as fads" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 747). Adoption of an innovation does not automatically lead to implementation. The fad mentality feeds into decisions to adopt innovations without planning for their maintenance because there is an underlying assumption that the program won't survive. The short-term pattern can result from a number of factors. Administrators and school board members may be attracted to the availability of incentive grants, but not be committed to the goals of a selected project (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991). Often district leaders want to be perceived as innovative, but concern themselves more with associating to symbols of reform rather than its substance (Fullan & Miles, 1992). Initial adoptions may be subject to erosion due to staff mobility, budgetary problems, changing priorities, or other factors. A network of support and common

implementation experiences can raise the problem-solving conversation of any given site by adding weight and practical options in an effort to meet local obstacles and setbacks.

## Planning for Expansion

There is an evolving emphasis in the dissemination process in the United States which is supporting the importance of long-term change as a result of collaborative implementation procedures. The Department of Education (Farquar, 1993) has outlined a new approach to nationwide dissemination reflecting the influences of systemic-change theories, school-culture research, and a constructivist view of learning. There is new attention to the processes needed to move beyond simple short-term adoption of an innovation to the more desirable endeavor of "institutionalizing change, that is, building and sustaining over time, practices and structures that promote comprehensive school improvement" (cited in Farquar, 1993).

Implementation moves into institutionalization as the project evolves in response to the tremendous forces brought to bear on any initial adoption by the unique characteristics of the new host system; this transition is a significant part of the dissemination and implementation process. The community of learners involved in implementation seeks to offer alternatives, actively engage users, and provide them with opportunities to fit innovations to the local setting. The implementation of Reading Recovery in more than 1,200 sites has reflected these trends and has been a process of constructing communication networks, analyzing priorities of the host system, and intentionally nurturing the feelings of success for all those involved. The variety of implementation models used for Reading Recovery throughout the United States reflects the efforts of Reading Recovery providers and implementors to accommodate and strengthen the existing vital processes of the host systems by the complementary acquisition of the innovation (Paynter, 1994).

Significant national educational reform can be shaped by intervention efforts when those efforts represent an intentionally designed structure that not only allows for but promotes wide-scale expansion. "Unless a project can disseminate its ideas and start having an impact on a large scale, it remains a costly experiment, affecting only the lives of a few people" (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991, p. 1). For development to be successful, this change of scale must be accomplished while preserving the integrity of the project without sacrificing quality. One prevalent assumption is that if a project is successful, replications will be automatic. Anyone involved in project development and dissemination understands that this is a myth. "Dissemination is not something that a project can do 'on the side'" (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991, p. 4). The Reading Recovery model uses the role of the university training center as an unconventional but highly effective dissemination network. The three-tiered staffing model in Reading Recovery creates formal and informal collegial networks between and among various implementation sites and the regional university centers.

The strength of a network to help secure adequate financial and personnel support to develop large-scale expansion cannot be overstated. Worthwhile change--substantial and important change--takes effort. Dissemination is a means to change and, like change, dissemination is a process, not an event. The dissemination process must be considered in the initial development of a project so that structures can be incorporated that will increase the likelihood of successful replications.

Some important considerations are essential to wide-scale expansion of a successful project: the original project must be determined to be stable, and the providers need a broad vision of the project that extends beyond their own local site. Fullan & Miles (1992) reiterate that all large-scale change is implemented locally and that no blueprints for change exist. Change is a journey, they suggest, guided by experts who are clear about the purpose, limitations, pitfalls of the innovation, and the rationales underlying quality assurances.

Time between adoption and implementation is needed to attend to matters of quality. Often the time between adoption and implementation is so minimal that adequate preparation has not transpired. In case studies of twelve districts, Huberman and Miles (1984) found that the shorter the time between adoption and implementation, the more problematic the implementation. Similarly, Fullan (1991) notes: "The more complex the change, the more work there is to do on quality" (p. 72).

One aspect of the Reading Recovery network that lends stability to the project as it expands is the constructive nature of the on-going professional development that promotes continual discourse regarding quality and consistency among a large number of continually expanding project sites. Without on-going inservice for teachers, the results--and therefore, the continuation of the project--may be jeopardized. The continuing contact of teachers through participation in four to six inservice sessions, which include observation and evaluation of the teaching of colleagues, represents the sustained assistance required for refinement of teaching expertise of high-craft Reading Recovery teachers and for responding to changes within schools.

## The Role of the Provider in the Dissemination Process

For every innovation, a provider guides potential implementors through the decisions that they will use to construct their project. The role of the provider is to nurture additional extensions without allowing new sites to become dependent on the initial provider. The provider functions as a bridge builder for the project to other situations and geographical areas. At the same time, the provider retains a certain detachment in order to promote independent problem solving by the new local site and prevent overwhelming demands on the existing projects (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991). Louis and Miles (1990) report that strong assistance is needed to support local reform, including at least thirty days of external assistance annually that is sustained over several years. If adequate resources are not allocated to support a long-term comprehensive implementation plan, the quality is threatened. If providers attempt to rescue local efforts, they may risk the life of the original project or other local project implementations. "Reform fails unless we can demonstrate that pockets of success add up to new structures and school cultures that press for continuous improvement" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, p. 748). Adoption and continuation are influenced by the degree that the effects of a successful intervention are visible to others. Reading Recovery provides feedback to all participants from the beginning and although there is stress related to being visible in a formative stage, the very visibility of the intervention supports its role as a systemic change agent. Clay (1993a) reports that children are the first to experience success after only a few weeks, followed by parental responses soon thereafter. Classroom teachers notice positive changes at about 8 weeks followed by administrators and finally, researchers.

As a provider, Reading Recovery has structured central data and information centers to support expansion efforts. Reading Recovery has a system of quality assurances built into the adoption process that outlines implementation in calibrated stages. Comprehensive annual reports from each Reading Recovery Site include data on the progress of all children served at the site and the accomplishments of the teachers and Teacher Leaders. Results of questionnaires completed by parents, central administrators, principals, classroom teachers, and Reading Recovery teachers are reported. As a National Diffusion Network project, data for all children served by Reading Recovery within the United States are collected and consolidated, site by site, state by state. The documentation of the results of the intervention is a significant factor contributing to the continuation of Reading Recovery and its visibility.

To create opportunities for children to undergo breakthroughs in literacy learning, effective interventions must thrive and contribute to the transformation of their hosting systems beyond the intervention itself. Indeed, change can happen only at the level of the individual, one child, one teacher, one administrator at a time. The role of interventions, embedded in host systems, that provide substantial change for the most needy individuals in the system is an essential role for the transformation of American education.

Stakeholders in the education of children must make informed choices about the use of limited financial and personnel resources. Clarity regarding the goals and benefits of an intervention will assist educators in selecting only those options that have the greatest leverage for impact on all levels of their system and that use a child's learning time economically (Clay, 1993a). Making an informed decision to implement a powerful intervention may not only transform the system but alter the way the participants in that system view the system, themselves, and others (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 1991) and challenge beliefs about change and the rate at which change is possible.

## References

Bernard van Leer Foundation (1991, April). Dissemination. *Bernard van Leer Foundation Newsletter, 62*, 1-11.

Clay, M. M. (1990, September). *The challenge of the 1990's: International literacy decade*. Invitational address to the 17th New Zealand Reading Association Conference, Palmerston North.

Clay, M. M. (1991). Reading Recovery surprises. In D. E. DeFord, C. A. Lyons, & G. S. Pinnell (Eds.), *Bridges to literacy: Learning from Reading Recovery* (pp. 55-74). Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clay, M. M. (1993a). *Reading Recovery: A guidebook for teachers in training*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Clay, M. M. (1993b). Reading Recovery: The wider implications of an educational innovation. In A. Watson & A. Bandenhop (Eds.), *Prevention of reading failure* (pp. 22-47). New York: Ashton Scholastic.

Dalin, P. (1978). *Limits to educational change*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Farquar, E. (1993, November). *A new approach to nationwide dissemination*. Paper presented at meeting of the National Dissemination Association, Phoenix, AZ.

Fullan, M. G. (1990). Staff development, innovation, and institutional development. In B. Joyce (Ed.), *Changing school culture through staff development* (pp. 3-25). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Fullan, M. G. (1991). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. G., & Miles, M. B. (1992). Getting reform right: What works and what doesn't. *Phi Delta Kappan, 7*, 744-752.

Goodlad, J. I. (1977). *Networking and educational improvement: Reflections on a strategy*. Washington, DC: NIE.

Huberman, M., & Miles, M. (1984). *Innovation up close*. New York: Plenum.

Louis, K. S., & Miles, M. B. (1990). *Improving the urban high school: What works and why*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Paynter, S. Y. (1994). Implementing innovation: Integrity and flexibility. *Network News, 6*, 6-7.

Rosenholtz, S. J. (1989). *Teachers' workplace: The social organization of schools*. New York: Longman.